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BOOK REVIEWS

The "Iphigenia in Tauris" of Euripides. Translated into English Rhyming Verse with Explanatory Notes by GILBERT MURRAY, LL.D., D.LITT., Regius Professor of Greek in the University of Oxford. Oxford University Press (American Branch), 1910.

The reader knows pretty well by this time what he may expect from a new translation by Professor Murray of a play of Euripides. Looked at as an English poem it will be certain to give pleasure. A strong sense of beauty in general will be exhibited, and an excellent technical facility. Comparison with Swinburne will inevitably suggest itself, and Professor Murray would doubtless be the first to declare that he cannot afford such a comparison. Still it must be said that if the swell and surge of Swinburne's line is not to be expected, Swinburne's characteristic vices are absent as well. As far as taste can take the place of genius Professor Murray is competent to make the substitution. He could not be guilty of bombast or redundancy or turgidity, and doubtless the restraint of his verse will cause it to be felt by many as more "Greek."

"Iphigenia in Tauris" is a poem so specially adapted to Professor Murray's talents that it is surprising he has left it so long untranslated. It is a romantic play with a happy ending, altogether modern in its psychology and as tightly bound together as though it were by Sardou. The dreadful problem of the Eumenides, of sin and remorse, which makes some Greek plays such hard reading, is here treated quite simply in the spirit of Ibsen by showing Orestes as the victim of fits, apparently epileptic in character. The noble rivalry in self-devotion of the two young heroes, the quiet competence of the heroine, the sympathetic action of the chorus allow the modern reader to know where he stands—a privilege he certainly loses when Jason and Medea wrangle, when Hercules gets drunk, when the objections of Pentheus (apparently so well founded) to the doings of the Maenads bring him to ruin. In a word, Euripides and Professor Murray have here collaborated to produce what should be the most popular of their joint works.

It would be interesting to secure, if we could, the opinion of Euripides on the question of rhymed verse as his English vehicle. In the matter of dramatic dialogue we may perhaps guess that he would approve the great English tradition of unrhymed verse. It is difficult to see any advantage of the rhymed couplet capable of offsetting its obvious disadvantages, but Professor Murray rhymes easily and well, and naturally likes to do it. The

question of the choruses is altogether different. Here the English tradition is all for rhyme; to omit it would be to lop off one of the wings on which the lyric flies. And yet Professor Murray's lyrics, graceful, charming, and certain as English songs, are precisely the most doubtful part of his rendering of the original. They come too trippingly on the tongue. There seems to be a fallacy in supposing that because a Greek strophe can be conveniently divided on the page into short verses it can be represented by an English strophe of equally short verses with a rhyme at the end of each. The rhyme interrupts the rhythm as the natural pause does not—it is a pebble on which the stream breaks, whereas the pause is a ripple due to the laws of motion of the fluid itself. Thus the movement of

τὰν πολυόρνιθον ἐπ' αἶαν,
 λευκὰν ἀκτάν, Ἀχιλλῆος
 δρόμους καλλισταδίου,
 ἀξείνον κατὰ πόντον; (435–38)

is not reproduced by the movement of

Birds, birds, everywhere,
 White as the foam, light as the air;
 And ghostly Achilles raceth there,
 Far in the Friendless Waters.

To go through Professor Murray's poem line by line with the original at hand gives a fresh sense of his dexterity as a translator. It is perhaps worth noting that he is unfortunate in retaining a discredited reading in l. 258 and in rendering ll. 258–59

'Tis so long a time, and never yet,
 Never, hath Greek blood made this altar wet,

since Orestes speaks at l. 72 of the altar "where Hellene blood is shed," and Iphigenia herself explains that a captive who died at her hands wrote her letter for her. And in view of the fact that she could not write, there is something droll in the expansion of ll. 206–7 into

From the beginning Strife,
 As a book to read, Fate gave me for mine own.

Expansion is in fact the temptation Professor Murray cannot resist, but a single example must suffice to warn the reader that he is not reading Euripides. Whereas Iphigenia said in Greek (369)

Ἀιδης Ἀχιλλεύς ῥιν ἄρ', οὐχ ὁ Πηλέως,

she says in English:

Is he a vampyre, is he one
 That fattens on the dead, thy Peleus' son?

But this is captious. Professor Murray's versions are to be received with gratitude. They are of great interest to scholars, and they have had a surprising effect in mollifying a public disposed to eliminate scholarship.

EMILY JAMES PUTNAM